

# “Chevrolet and Manchester United: a transformational sponsorship in a traditional industry”

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# Chevrolet and Manchester United: a transformational sponsorship in a traditional industry

## Abstract

Sport sponsorships continue to expand in both financial significance and global reach. In 2012 Chevrolet (one of the most iconic American companies with significant global appeal) and Manchester United (one of the most iconic soccer teams in the world) agreed to a record sponsorship estimated to be worth US\$560 million over 7 years. This mega-sponsorship has initiated intense conversation in the automotive industry, the professional sports world, and among academics who follow trends in sport sponsorship. This paper sets out to understand *why* Chevrolet would enter into a partnership with this level of commitment, *what* outcomes Chevrolet expects from the sponsorship, and *how* the company intends to implement promotions around the sponsorship. The study answers these questions by examining the views of various industry experts and supporting our findings with additional sources of data.

**Keywords:** sport sponsorship, brand strategy, sports marketing, case study.

## Introduction

In July 2012 one of the most iconic companies in the world and one of the most iconic soccer teams in the world signed a record sponsorship contract. Chevrolet, part of General Motors Corporation, and Manchester United signed a deal worth up to \$560 million dollars over 7 years starting in 2012 and running through 2019 (O'Leary, 2014). Since this contract was signed on July 26, 2012, it has created a lot of buzz in both the automotive industry and the professional sports world. In this paper we set out to understand why Chevrolet would agree to a deal of this magnitude with Manchester United, how Chevrolet expects to benefit from the sponsorship, and how they plan to execute the agreement. We answer these questions by examining in-depth interviews with industry executives and supporting our findings with additional sources of data.

### 1. Chevrolet history

Billy Durant (one of the co-founders of Chevrolet) founded General Motors in 1904 and served on the board until he was ousted in 1910. Subsequently, Durant partnered with Louis Chevrolet to found Chevrolet Motor Company on November 3, 1911 in Detroit, Michigan. Chevrolet was a Swiss racecar driver and Durant was a business-minded investor. Over time, conflict emerged as Chevrolet and Durant developed different perspectives on how the company should be run. These conflicts lead to Durant buying Chevrolet out of the company in 1914. By 1916 Durant and Chevrolet Motor Company had become so successful he was able to buy enough stock in General Motors to gain control of the company that he had founded. Shortly after, Chevrolet was brought under the umbrella of General Motors.

Aside from helping start two successful companies, Durant's greatest contribution was forming the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) in

1919 (Lewis, 2008). GMAC was the first company to offer financing for customers to purchase vehicles. This gave ordinary people the ability to purchase vehicles and made owning an automobile a reality for a much greater portion of the population who otherwise may not have the money to buy a car outright.

What is recognized as the golden age of General Motors started in the 1930s under the leadership of Alfred P. Sloan. Sloan was another pioneer in the automotive industry and under his watch General Motors surpassed Ford as the largest automotive company in the world, a title that it would hold for the next 70 years. Even still, the company's success did not come without adversity. From the 1930s until today GM had many ups and downs. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s GM had many product problems, management issues, and competitive challenges with both European and Japanese imports coming into the American car market. These factors lead to a steady decline in market share and a loss in profit due to an unsustainable cost structure. In 2008, when the credit crisis hit the United States, GM was dealt a serious blow as the company was forced into a structured bankruptcy with the help of the Federal Government. Today, GM has emerged from bankruptcy as a more viable company and has recorded 14 straight profitable quarters as of July 2013.

### 2. Manchester United history

Manchester United was founded in 1898 as the Newton Heath LYR Football Club and then in 1902 the club changed its name to Manchester United. In the early years the team was not nearly as successful as it is currently and there were a series of times that the club needed to be rescued from financial woes by private investors. The team won its first league championship in 1908 and moved to their iconic home of Old Trafford Stadium in 1910. The following year in 1911 the team won their second league title. The following 40 plus years were not very good ones for the club. The club bounced in-

between the first and second division of English professional soccer. The team stopped playing through the years of the First World War and the Second World War. During the second world war Old Trafford was involved in two separate bombing raids, which the second one destroyed a major section of the stadium and cost the team £17,000 to remove the rubble and rebuild.

United reclaimed some success in the early 1950s and was able to win its first league title in 41 years in 1952. Over the next 20 years the team had mild success and then in 1986 the organization hired Sir Alex Ferguson to serve as the team's manager. Under Sir Alex's management the team went on to win 13 of its 19 English League titles and added its 20<sup>th</sup> title this last season. In 2005 the club was purchased by American businessman Malcom Glazer in what some considered to be a hostile takeover (Lyll, 2005). In July 2012 the club was taken public on the New York Stock exchange for a price of \$14 per share. The IPO valued the club at \$2.3 billion making it the most valuable sports team in the world (Bandenhausen, 2012).

### 3. Jersey sponsorship history

Most of the credit for the idea of sponsoring a team's jersey goes to Gunter Mast, the nephew of Jagermeister creator Curt Mast (Manes, 2012). Jagermeister had been a sponsor of racing teams in the past but Mast thought that he could reach many more people by putting the companies name or logo on the jersey of a team playing the world's most popular sport. In 1972 Mast approached Eintracht Braunschweig a German soccer team about putting Jagermeister's stag and glowing cross logo on the front of their jerseys. The club was open to the idea because it was having financial issues and needed new sources of revenue. Mast liked the idea because he felt that "through football, you can reach all segments of the population". (Allen, 2011). The initial investment details are not known but most accounts indicate Mast paid in the neighborhood of 500,000 German Marks for the sponsorship rights (Manes, 2012).

At the time there were no other deals like this in Europe and the German Football league would only allow the teams to have logos on their shirts or the team insignia. When the team went to the league to get permission to move forward with the sponsorship deal the league turned them down immediately. However that was not the end of the matter as the team held a vote to change the team's logo from a red lion to the Stag and Cross of the Jagermeister logo. The vote passed. This move limited the German Football Leagues power to tell Eintracht Braunschweig that they could not put a sponsor on their jersey and on March 23, 1973 the club took the field with the Jagermeister brand mark

as their new team logo. Seven months later the German Football League authorized the use of sponsorships on jerseys in the league (Allen, 2011).

Other professional leagues soon followed the German League and started allowing sponsors to advertise on the club's shirts. In England the first team to get a sponsor on their shirts was Kettering Town of the English Southern League in 1976. Kettering received a sponsorship from Kettering Tyers, which was a local tire company. However the English football league threatened to fine Kettering if the team did not remove the logo. Kettering changed the letters to say "Kettering T", stating that the 'T' stood for town. The English league did not support this action, nor did they accept this explanation, and forced the team to remove the letters. One year later in 1977 the English league allowed clubs to play with sponsors logos on their shirts (Allen, 2011).

Even though these teams had won sponsorship battles against their respective leagues and opened a new form of revenue for themselves, there was still one obstacle preventing the teams and advertisers from taking these deals to the next level, appearing on television (Manes, 2012). The networks that broadcast the games would not allow teams to wear sponsored jerseys if the games were being televised. It was not until 1983, almost 10 years after the first jersey sponsorship that teams were allowed to play with the team's sponsored jerseys on television. When this happened it was a tipping point for both the teams and the sponsors allowing them to capitalize on the true value of these sponsorship agreements.

### 4. Manchester United jersey sponsorship history

Manchester United entered the sponsorship race right away once teams were permitted to play on television with sponsored jerseys. The first company to sponsor Manchester United was Sharp Electronics in 1982. Sharp paid Manchester United £200,000 per season for their jersey sponsorship and the relationship lasted until 1999 (Hiscott, 2011). In 2000, Vodafone (a British telecommunications company) agreed to a four-year £30 million deal to be the team's jersey sponsor. This contract was renewed for four additional years at a cost of £36 million (Ducker, 2009). However the deal ended after 6 years when Vodafone pulled out to concentrate on other sponsorship deals. The sponsorship was then acquired by American International Group (AIG) in 2006 in a four-year deal worth £56.5 million (BBC News, 2006). At the time this was the largest jersey sponsorship deal in the world.

Manchester United set the jersey sponsorship record again in 2009 with another American insurance company called Aon. This time Manchester agreed to another four-year deal but the total deal was worth £80 million (Smith, 2009; Ducker, 2009).

One year later Manchester United agreed to a deal with package carrier DHL for the sponsorship of the team's practice jerseys. Not only was this the first recorded sponsorship of practice jerseys on record, Manchester United reportedly signed the deal for £40 million over four years (Gibson, 2011).

Then, in July of last year Chevrolet and General Motors became the 5<sup>th</sup> sponsor of the Manchester United jerseys with a lucrative nine-year deal. The deal includes a two-year sponsorship as the club's official automotive sponsor at £11 million pounds (\$18.6 million) per year and a seven-year deal to sponsor the club's jersey at £44.75 million (\$70 million) per year (Mirror News, 2012). This deal was yet another record sponsorship with General Motors and Chevrolet paying an estimated total of \$559 million to partner with the club. Note that at the current exchange rate that would be approximately £364 million representing a 224% increase from the deal that Manchester United signed with Aon just 4 years earlier.

### 5. Globalization of the Chevrolet brand

Chevrolet has a rich history in the United States. There are countless songs that have become part of America's culture that reference Chevrolet vehicles. There are also many advertising slogans that have entered American culture like "See the USA in Your Chevrolet" or "Baseball, hotdogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet". Outside of the United States Chevrolet is not as noticeable brand as Coca-Cola or Apple. The reason is for most of GM's history they have produced cars in other countries under different nameplates. For example, in Europe GM produces Opel, in Australia they produce Holden, in China they produce Wulong, in Korea they produced Daewoo, and in England they produce Vauxhall. Coming out of bankruptcy in 2010 the company developed a strategy to increase the presence of the Chevrolet brand around the world and, along with Cadillac, have two truly global brands (Simon, 2011). As a result, Chevrolets are now sold in every one of the countries listed above and in some cases compete directly with the company's other brands.

In total Chevrolets are now sold in 140 countries accounting for 60% of the brand's total sales (Gasoli, 2013). The Chevrolet Cruze, one of the first Chevrolet-branded cars that was launched and sold globally, surpassed the Silverado pickup truck as the company's top selling vehicle in 2011 (Simon, 2011). In 2013 the company launched its first global marketing platform that will be used in every country where Chevrolet sells cars. The title of the global platform is "Find New Roads" (Bennett, 2013). The sponsorship of Manchester United complements this new global branding for Chevrolet due to the reach that not only soccer has around the world but the club has as well.

### 6. Chevrolet's goal

Considering this sponsorship in the correct context, what is Chevrolet's goal? Why is the company only now launching, or in some cases re-launching, the Chevrolet brand globally and how does Manchester United fit into this initiative? Looking to the CEO of General Motors, Dan Akerson, may provide answers. Akerson has charged Chevrolet with two goals related to the brand. First, be recognized as a top ten global brand in ten years (O'Leary, 2014). Second, more industry specific, become the #1 automotive brand in the world within ten years (Gasoli, 2013). The initiative was handed down in 2012 and the results are expected by 2020, one year after the current deal with Manchester United ends.

The benchmark Chevrolet is using to measure the outcome of its strategic initiative comes from rankings published by Interbrand (Interbrand, 2012). Interbrand last published a 'top 100 brands' list in 2012 when the top ten companies were Coca Cola, Apple, IBM, Google Microsoft, GE, McDonalds, Intel, Samsung, and Toyota. There were 11 automotive brands on Interbrand's list and Chevrolet was not one of them (Interbrand, 2012). In addition to Interbrand, there are two other companies that rank brands. One is Brandz which is managed by WPP Plc., a large British advertising agency. Brandz also produces a list of the top 100 brands based on their own research. Chevrolet does not appear on the Brandz list. The top brand in 2013 according to Brandz was Apple, Inc. The top global automotive brand listed was Toyota at number 23 (Brandz, 2013).

Another brand-ranking firm is Brand Finance. Brand Finance's list includes up to 500 companies. Chevrolet did appear on the Brand Finance list at number 175, moving up from 211 from 2012 to 2013. The top brand on this list was Apple, Inc. once again and the top Automotive Company was BMW (Brand Finance, 2013). Chevrolet is betting that with the sponsorship of the Manchester United Jersey, increasing recognition levels of their brand and logo will enhance customer perceptions of the company. This outcome, along with the initiative to build world class products to enhance the way people view the product's quality, will help them move up in global brand rankings (Gasoli, 2013).

Chevrolet recently demonstrated progress with the company's initiative to build world-class products by winning several quality awards. In fact, Chevrolet received two awards for brand quality that were unprecedented in the company's history. In June of 2013 Chevrolet ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among all manufacturers in JD Power's Initial Quality Survey (J.D. Power, 2013). This is the highest ranking that Chevrolet has ever received and placed behind only Porsche, GMC, Lexus, and Infiniti in the survey.

Chevrolet also received five awards from JD Power for having the highest initial quality on five vehicles in their respective segments. In July, Consumer Reports rated the recently launched 2014 Impala with a 95/100 score. This was the third highest score that Consumer Reports had ever given a vehicle and the highest score for a sedan in the publication's history. The only two cars that received a higher rating from Consumer Reports were the Tesla S and a BMW 1-Series (Consumer Reports, 2013).

### 7. Return on investment

In 2012, Kantar Media reported that of Manchester United's fans worldwide, 325 million are in the Asia-Pacific region, including 108 million in China alone. While conducting research for our paper we had the opportunity to review various interviews with top-executives from Chevrolet who are in charge of the Manchester United partnership for the company. How does Chevrolet plan to measure the return on investment with the Manchester United Deal? Not surprisingly, the answer was aligned with the charge given by GM's CEO to improve the company's global brand rankings and consumer perceptions. Specifically, global marketing chief Tim Mahoney, noting that much of the team's fan base is in key emerging markets, stated "the partnership with Manchester United is of a global nature, and we intend to continue this relationship to help build the Chevrolet brand around the globe" (O'Leary, 2014). In 2009, China became Chevrolet's third-largest market, behind the U.S. and Brazil.

The specific goal with the Manchester United partnership is very focused on soccer fans globally. The marketing team's job with this partnership is to improve brand equity with soccer fans, sell the program and integrate the assets from the sponsorship to the different global regions that reside within General Motors, and finally get soccer fans into the upper funnel of consideration to purchase a Chevrolet. The specific regions around the world are responsible for the customers once they enter the lower funnel just before making a purchase decision (Gasoli, 2013). At the time we spoke with Chevrolet representatives they indicated the company was still very early in this process and therefore the main goal of the project was to familiarize soccer fans around the world with the Chevrolet brand. The primary reason that Manchester United was selected to aid in that process is because "Manchester United has pioneered a truly global sports model and is one of the U.K.'s greatest exports with incredibly broad appeal," said Steve Martin, CEO, M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment. "Up to 200 countries broadcast the Premier League to make sure the games are in living rooms, restaurants and pubs around the world" (O'Leary, 2014).

### 8. Soccer demographics

One can look at the demographics of soccer fans around the world to understand why this partnership with Manchester United makes sense for reaching a lot of consumers in a very short period of time. As previously mentioned, Chevrolet's main objective with this program is to raise the image of the brand globally but there are some areas that are going to get more attention than others. Most marketers have likely heard of the so-called BRIC nations: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. These are the large developing countries of the world where most global corporations are trying to gain a first mover advantage with goods and services.

Within Chevrolet, and particularly with this sponsorship, Chevrolet is focused on BRICKU (Gasoli, 2013). These are the same four countries as before but Chevrolet has added K and U which stand for (South) Korea and the United States. South Korea was added due to its large automotive market and substantial soccer fan base. General Motors has had a presence in South Korea for a long time but the Chevrolet brand has not. The United States was added because it is the second largest automotive market in the world, it serves as Chevrolet's headquarters, and according to Marketing Week, it has one of the fastest growing soccer fan bases in the world with tremendous growth potential in the future (Gasoli, 2013). To further illustrate the logic behind choosing these markets, see tables 1 and 2 below that provide data Kantar Media (2013). Both tables offer data indicating the population percentage of each country that consider themselves a soccer fan.

Table 1. Percent of adult population following football (soccer)

Country	Percentage
Brazil	68%
Spain	64%
Italy	58%
Germany	51%
Ireland	51%
China	45%
United Kingdom	44%
South Korea	43%
Russia	42%
France	31%
Australia	23%
United States	8%

Source: Kantar Mediana.

Table 2. Millions following football (soccer)

Country	People (millions)
China	138.1
Brazil	43.2
Germany	34.8
Italy	29.7

Table 2 (cont.). Millions following football (soccer)

Country	People (millions)
Spain	24.5
Russia	23.4
United Kingdom	22.1
United States	19.8
South Korea	16.8
France	15.9
Australia	3.9
Ireland	1.8

Source: Kantar Mediana.

Kantar Media (2013) also conducted surveys to identify fans’ favorite soccer team across several countries. The study found that Manchester United was the number one team in three of the five countries Chevrolet is targeting within BRICKU (i.e., China, South Korea, and the United States). The other countries in the survey were the United Kingdom where Manchester United was #1 and Brazil where the club was #8. Note that one reason the popularity of the club is so low in Brazil is because the Brazilian fans are very passionate about their own professional league and the fact that the top tier Spanish League, La Liga, has been pulling players out of Brazil for a very long time. As a result, Brazilian support has followed those players (Gasoli, 2013).

Additional facts of interest that were provided by Kantar Media regarding the demographics of soccer fans involve the differences among the countries that were studied by Kantar. For example, in South Korea the fans are very loyal player. At one time Manchester United had a player named Park Ji-Sung who played for the club from 2005 to 2012. During that time the following of the club in South Korea reached an all-time high and helped the club become the most popular team in South Korea. Even though Manchester United is still the most popular team in South Korea they have seen a decrease in loyalty among South Korean fans since Park Ji-Sung left the club (O’Leary, 2014; Kantar Mediana, 2013).

The characteristics of soccer fans in Central and South American countries are very similar in that their loyalty to a particular team often revolves around players from their home country (Kantar Mediana, 2013). In contrast, in the United Kingdom it is almost exclusively about the team, not a particular player, which garners support. In many cases loyalty to the club has been passed down from generation to generation. In this case, team loyalty becomes a matter of tradition strengthening the relationship between a soccer club and its fans. One drawback is this intense loyalty makes it difficult for Chevrolet to capitalize on the soccer sponsorship outside of the Manchester United fan base in the UK (O’Leary, 2014). In fact, in some cases the deep

loyalties in the United Kingdom for their teams can have a negative effect. To counter this, Chevrolet also entered into a sponsorship deal with Liverpool F.C. as their official automotive partner. The contract with Liverpool F.C. was signed five days before the Manchester United deal was signed (O’Leary, 2014). The Liverpool sponsorship is not as great of a financial commitment as the Manchester United deal and Chevrolet will not be the sponsor on Liverpool’s jersey. The full financial terms of the deal were not disclosed but the term of the deal is four years. Signing both of these teams was somewhat controversial because Liverpool and Manchester United are long time rivals. It would be equivalent to becoming the official sponsor of the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox at the same time (Buss, 2013).

Chevrolet capitalized on the controversy by releasing a campaign called #Drivenby which was focused around social media through Twitter and a series of broadcast commercials. The commercials featured key players from both soccer clubs talking about their teams while reading from the same script. Their faces were split down the middle of the screen so half of each players face was matched up with a players face from the rival team. The commercials aired before and during the game between the two teams on January 13, 2013. The feedback in England was profoundly negative and immediate. Many angry fans from both clubs took to their twitter accounts to post comments like “Rivalry is the best thing in football. Chevrolet doesn’t understand” and “RIP Chevrolet” (Sanderson, 2013).

The Chevrolet marketing team commented on this controversial campaign in England and agreed that the feedback from the ad in the UK was intense and negative. In fact, the numbers that came back to Chevrolet suggested 95% of the people in the UK did not like the ad (Gasoli, 2013). Chevrolet went on to say that the ads intention was to play on the positive side of the rivalry and focus on the fact that the rivals bring out the best in each other. Even though feedback in the UK was very negative due to the history of the rivalry, in other parts of the world like Asia the ad received a very positive response (Gasoli, 2013). Fortunately for Chevrolet, recognition from soccer fans outside of the UK is part of what the company was seeking by signing these two teams simultaneously (O’Leary, 2014).

In further response to the controversy, Chevrolet was quick to point out the numbers in Tables 1 and 2 above to illustrate that even though 44% of the people in the United Kingdom consider themselves soccer fans, when all the numbers wash out that is only two million more self-described soccer fans than in the United States where 8% of the population considers

themselves a soccer fan. This indicates Chevrolet is focusing on delivering its advertising message to markets with the highest growth potential. Based on comments from Chevrolet, one can surmise the company's position is that although it is unfortunate fans in England did not like the commercials; the rest of the world liked it. As a result, the company has succeeded with what it was trying to accomplish with BRICKU.

## 9. Global launch and execution

Chevrolet clearly feels that the sponsorship with Manchester United was the best option for the company to quickly acquire a global platform to gain recognition and build brand awareness. At the time of this study, it is the only true global platform that the company has. This platform will not only help Chevrolet reach parts of the world where they were not previously reaching, it is also an 'always on' marketing campaign that never shuts down (Gasoli, 2013). Similar to American football fans that follow, for example, the South Eastern Conference of the collegiate ranks, Manchester United represents a year-round season with many of their fans. Even when the team is not playing, fans are watching what is happening with player transfers or what the players are doing for their national teams.

Relatively speaking, Chevrolet is still very early into its partnership with Manchester United. The Chevrolet team suggests this initial period has been focused on building a base for not only the Manchester United sponsorship but the company's entire soccer initiative. In the last year Chevrolet has signed agreements with Manchester United, Liverpool F.C., become the official automotive sponsor of the U.S. Men's National Soccer team that will compete in the World Cup, and helped launch the One World Football Project (Burden, 2013). The first three of these initiatives are self-explanatory. The One World Football Project is a social marketing plan that Chevrolet recently launched where a person can donate \$25 and Chevrolet will give an 'indestructible soccer ball' to a community in a needy country. As of May 2013 the project had delivered 330,000 of these soccer balls to kids in underdeveloped countries. The goal of the program is to donate 1.5 million soccer balls around the world. The musician Sting founded the One World Football Project and Chevrolet is a founding sponsor of the program (One World Football, 2014).

Chevrolet continues to build a comprehensive online presence and social media network around all of its soccer platforms as a way of connecting the consumers they want to reach through this soccer initiative. The title of the platform is "Chevrolet FC" which encompasses a website ([www.chevroletfc.com](http://www.chevroletfc.com)), a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, and a Twitter account. All of these separate elements are being integrated under

one management system so Chevrolet FC will be able to manage all of the content that is produced. Here is a current snapshot of statistics around the Chevrolet FC program: The Chevrolet Facebook Page has over 25,000 likes, the Twitter handle @ChevroletFC has more than 24,000 followers, and the Chevrolet FC Youtube page has over 7,000 subscribers. These numbers suggest Chevrolet has experienced a fairly good level of interaction only one year into the sponsorship. Chevrolet expects these numbers to increase significantly with their logo appearing on the Manchester United jersey (O'Leary, 2014).

Much like the differences in how fans follow and support various teams, the Chevrolet marketing team pointed out that they are seeing a lot of different interaction on their social networks by different geographical area. In fact, the number one area where they are seeing the greatest interaction is in Asia with Thailand being the top country for interaction followed by China (One World Football, 2014). Chevrolet stated that Asia as a whole is "soccer crazy" and anything related to Manchester United is well received by Asian soccer. One way that Chevrolet is looking to Capitalize on the interaction with the fans is through "Surprise and Delight" promotions before and during the soccer season. The objective of these programs will be to engage local markets in a brand building effort, offer fans access to their favorite team, and build relationships and social credibility with influencers (One World Football, 2014). Some fans will receive different Manchester United items like jerseys and other goods and a few fans will receive tickets to a game of their choice with all travel expenses to the game included.

In addition to all of the other elements on of the sponsorship, Chevrolet also worked (and continues to work) closely with the team to activate promotions onsite at Manchester United games. For example, Chevrolet logos were placed on the chairs where players and the team manager sit during games. As a result, when television cameras focus on the bench area the Chevrolet logo will be present. Another area where Chevrolet has integrated with the team involves the Chevrolet 360 degree panoramic photo of Old Trafford during Manchester United games. This allows fans to visit the page on the Manchester United site and view a 360 degree view of the stadium during the game, find themselves in the crowd, and then tag themselves at the game on Facebook with their picture in the crowd. This has been very popular with fans. Whenever Manchester United mentions the promotion on their Facebook page with over 34 million followers, the traffic on the site increases dramatically and funnels that traffic to the Chevrolet FC web page and Facebook page (One World Football, 2014).

Chevrolet is also increasing its presence at the stadium in other ways as well. The Chevrolet logo is displayed on the LED boards that surround the field at Old Trafford and the logo is present while action is taking place on the field. With the current sponsorship, Chevrolet has a 42% share of voice on the LED board during Manchester United home games (Buss, 2013). Going even further, the Chevrolet logo is displayed on the backdrop during post-game interviews with the managers and players. Chevrolet is not the only sponsor on the backdrop but the company estimates it has a 34% share on the backdrop during interviews (Buss, 2013).

When Manchester United and Liverpool played their game on January 13, 2013 Chevrolet had a massive on site activation in place at Old Trafford Stadium. Banners were strategically placed at all of the entrances to the stadium, vehicles were placed around the stadium for the fans to look at before the game, a booth was set up with replicas of chairs that the players sit on in the bench area with the Chevrolet Logo on them. The chairs were placed against a green screen so when fans take pictures it will appear that they are sitting next to Manchester United players and managers. An interactive promotion was set-up as a skills competition at the stadium with different soccer skills challenges for fans to enjoy (Buss, 2013). As part of the agreement, Chevrolet has the option to activate these stadium experiences at all Manchester United home games (Gasoli, 2013).

Many of these onsite promotions were also activated during Manchester United's exhibition tour of China last year. In fact, the soccer skills challenge event was scored by fans as the highest rated experience outside of the actual game (One World Football, 2014). The seat promotion (where fans can take pictures against the green screen) was also used by Chevrolet at both the Paris and Geneva Auto shows. According to Chevrolet, all of these assets can be used by any of Chevrolet's global regions either when Manchester United plays a game in their territory or if there is another large event scheduled.

One of the most intriguing findings that came from our conversation with Chevrolet is that with this partnership being fully implemented, and the company being the lead sponsor on the team jersey, Chevrolet will be reaching more people per week globally than the company could achieve with a Super Bowl advertisement (Gasoli, 2013). This is interesting because last year Chevrolet decided that they were not going to advertise during the Super Bowl and received some criticism for this decision (Buss, 2013). It appears Chevrolet is betting big by forgoing their traditional advertising approach and hoping the impressions they get from this sponsorship will help them meet the company's marketing objectives.

## 10. China: the most important piece

Even though this campaign is centered on global branding, China is the most important piece of the puzzle. In 2010 China passed the United States to claim the title of the largest car market in the world. Even though the car market has bounced back in the United States in the past couple of years China has not relinquished its lead and has actually increased it. At the end of 2012 there were 19,067,224 cars sold in China compared to 14,488,102 sold in the United States (Focus to Move 2013). That is about a 4.5 million car difference between the two countries. To further illustrate how many cars this is in the global car market, that difference equals the total number of new cars sold in Brazil in all of 2012, plus about 1 million cars. China is not slowing down and by the end of the decade forecasts indicate there will be 40 million cars sold annually in China (Reed, 2011).

The data in Tables 1 and 2 above show there are 138.1 million soccer fans in China. Another study by Kantar Sport conducted for Manchester United found that the team has up to 659 million fans globally. The study also broke down the fan base regionally showing that Manchester United had 71 million fans in the Americas, 90 million fans in Europe, 173 million in the Middle East and Africa, and 325 million fans in Asia, with 108 million of those residing in China (Ozarian, 2012). Based on these two studies one can conclude that 78% of China's 138.1 million soccer fans, in some form, are fans of Manchester United. That gives Chevrolet a significant opportunity to get the company's brand and logo in front of a large portion of China's total population.

One year after the sponsorship was signed, the ties between Chevrolet and Manchester United were already very evident in China. For example, the company is currently using the Manchester United Brand in "Road Shows" that are taking place across China. A road show is an auto show in a truck. At the shows Chevrolet has set up kicking contests for kids, displays with Manchester United Signs, and of course Chevrolet cars and trucks for people to get in and look around. The goal of these road shows is to introduce a brand to customers that may know a little to nothing about Chevrolet. The Chevrolet road shows in China are targeted at the rural population that is often poorer than the coastal regions. However, the road show promotion is expected to yield results because as these areas of China gain economic traction this is where the majority of growth in the Chinese car market will come from in the next few years (Bomey, 2013). In effect, Chevrolet has the opportunity to brand the company from scratch as a global brand rather than just an American company.



Distribution will also be a critical element to Chevrolet's success in China. Currently, Chevrolet has 620 dealers in China and plans to add another 45 points of distribution this year bringing the total to 665 dealers (Bomey, 2013). Most of these new points will be opened in the developing areas where the road shows are taking place. Chevrolet's Chinese dealerships also see value in the sponsorship with Manchester United. Dealers have placed Manchester United posters on the walls for customers to see when they enter the showroom. This further helps to link the Chevrolet brand to the soccer team.

## Conclusion

Chevrolet has decided to invest heavily in its global soccer campaign. This is most notable with the Manchester United sponsorship where the company will be paying \$559 million over 9 years. Chevrolet is breaking away from years of established marketing

practice that relied almost exclusively on traditional forms of advertising. This move does not seem so risky when one considers the opportunity and global reach offered by both soccer and Manchester United. The deal is perfectly aligned with Chevrolet's goal of being the number one global automotive brand. The value of this sponsorship is further supported by the fact that in many countries around the world Chevrolet is not a highly recognizable brand. The company's commitment to soccer sponsorship will assure the Chevrolet logo gets in front of soccer fans. Chevrolet's goal is in reach as the company continues to back up its world-class marketing with high quality products and sound distribution strategy. Interested scholars and practitioners continue to watch as Chevrolet works to parlay this sponsorship into higher brand ratings, increased interest among car shoppers, and a higher conversion rate turning these shoppers into Chevrolet customers.

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